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A Questionable Appeal for Public Trust

The President and his Attorney General, Mr. Kleindienst have now clarified the central issue in the Watergate-campaign financing affair, which has occupied so much of our attention in recent weeks. The President, echoing earlier statements by his Attorney General has assured us that there is no need for the appointment of a special prosecutor in this matter, and indeed, that he is persuaded "categorically" that "no one in the White House staff, no one in this administration, presently employed, was involved" in the incident—(two former cabinet officers, Mitchell and Stans, and three others with prior White House connections, Sloan, Liddy and Hunt are not so "presently employed"). Mr. Kleindienst, for his part, has promised "the most extensive, thorough, and comprehensive investigation since the assassination of President Kennedy." In essence, these are appeals—based in large measure on the high office of each man—that we cede our skepticism to their sense of duty to country and their high honor. We would insist that there are a few more questions to be asked—and answered—before the public can make such an investment of faith.

Let us look at the record built to date. Central to the whole issue, it seems to us, is the \$10 million secret fund assembled for Mr. Nixon's re-election by Mr. Maurice Stans and others before the date on which the law required the names of donors to be made public. The Watergate affair, though raising serious questions of its own, is most instructive in the light it sheds on the Republicans' extreme reluctance to reveal the names of the contributors to that fund.

Beyond that, there are other matters which make one wonder what the trust for which Messrs. Nixon and Kleindienst ask is to be based upon. There was the quick turnabout on the milk price support issue after associations of dairymen had raised substantial campaign money for the Republicans. Then there is the grain deal with the Soviet Union in which high government officials, with privileged knowledge of the intentions of our government, move so freely and quickly between public office and private companies participating in the transactions, that a scorecard is necessary to tell who is sitting where and doing what to and for whom at any given moment. And there was the Special Assistant to the co-chairman of the Republican National Committee, who saw nothing wrong in asking the banking director of the U.S. Postal Service to use his public muscle to help gain a \$500,000 private loan for a Washington area builder (and reciprocally, there was the banking director who saw no impropriety in the request and so, went on and did the favor).

All of this strongly suggests that in this administration, the line between public duty and private interest is either non-existent, or very blurry, at best. The insistence on secrecy about campaign donations does little to suggest that there is a fervent effort afoot to find that line.

But, Mr. Nixon also asks us to base our trust in the investigations now underway. He mentions the GAO inquiry, which has now been completed, and which, as we have previously noted, raises a host of questions which remain to be answered. Then

he lists the investigations carried out by Clark MacGregor, chairman of his campaign committee, Maurice Stans, his finance chief (whose safe contained at least a \$350,000 stash which is near to the center of the controversy), John Dean and his own White House counsel. All that can be said of that list of men, honorable though they may all be, is that they are hardly disinterested parties. And that goes for John Mitchell as well, whose own investigation has been cited at earlier times as something that should give us all comfort about these matters.

That leaves, among those mentioned by the President, the Congressional investigation and the operations by the FBI and the Department of Justice. The Republicans have already tried to cast Rep. Patman's investigation in a partisan light, so we'll have to take the President's mention of his investigation as a throw-in. Which brings us to the Department of Justice. Mr. Kleindienst has been a highly political man and he owes his present high responsibilities to Messrs. Nixon and Mitchell, whose fates and reputations hang significantly on the outcome of this matter. Moreover, Mr. Kleindienst was involved deeply—and unsatisfactorily, to our way of thinking—in the ITT affair and in the matter of Harry Steward, the U.S. Attorney in San Diego, whose indiscretions the Justice Department covered up in the name of preserving respect for the law. And then, of course, there was the Department of Justice's lack of focus in trying both to represent the Committee for the Re-election of the President and other Republican-connected defendants in the Democrats' civil suit, on the one hand, and their prosecution of the Watergate defendants, on the other. The doubts raised by those issues hardly need sharpening by the reminder that Mr. Gray of the FBI, and Mr. Silbert, the prosecutor looking into the Watergate affair, both work for Mr. Kleindienst.

Finally, we have poor Mr. Liddy. His past indiscretions have been showered on newspaper readers in such profusion over the last few days that one wonders who benefits from the sudden public knowledge that he was an undisciplined employee and an unabashed gun and bugging fan at the time he was given high responsibilities in the White House and in the President's campaign. Are we to believe that long ago Treasury didn't whisper to the White House about Mr. Liddy or that the White House didn't whisper to the Committee for the Re-election of the President? Or, is it not perhaps more likely that the Republicans around town knew about Mr. Liddy and his proclivities and his views and that the public revelations of those views at this time simply serve some intention now to isolate him as the lone "bad egg" in all of this?

Well, those are only some of the questions that map out a long and, as yet, unfinished road. They are large questions and raise real problems about the state of our Republic these days. But they are the stuff on which the request for our trust is made and from which, unfortunately, the erosion of faith in our institutions and our political process also proceed.